



Provincial Health Services Authority

For the Patient: Cytarabine injection
Other names: CYTOSAR®

- Cytarabine (sye-TARE-a-been) is a drug that is used to treat many types of cancer. It is a clear liquid that is injected into a vein, muscle, or under the skin.
- Tell your doctor if you have ever had an unusual or **allergic reaction** to cytarabine before receiving cytarabine.
- A **blood test** may be taken before each treatment. The dose and timing of your treatment may be changed based on the test results and/or other side effects.
- Other drugs such as digoxin (LANOXIN®) may **interact** with cytarabine. Tell your doctor if you are taking this or any other drugs as you may need extra blood tests or your dose may need to be changed. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you start or stop taking any other drug.
- The **drinking of alcohol** (in small amounts) does not appear to affect the safety or usefulness of cytarabine.
- Cytarabine may cause **sterility** in men and **menopause** in women. If you plan to have children, discuss this with your doctor before being treated with cytarabine.
- Cytarabine may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with cytarabine. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. Do not breast feed during treatment.
- **Tell** your doctor, dentist, and other health professionals that you are being treated with cytarabine before you receive any treatment from them.

Changes in blood counts

Cytarabine may cause temporary changes in your blood counts. Your doctor will be following these changes carefully by ordering regular blood tests. Adjustment of your treatment may be needed in certain circumstances.

BLOOD COUNTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Normal white blood cells protect your body by fighting bacteria (germs) that cause infection. When they are low, you are at greater risk of having an infection.</p>	<p>To help prevent infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands often and always after using the bathroom. • Avoid crowds and people who are sick. • Call your healthcare team immediately at the first sign of an infection such as fever (over 38°C or 100°F by an oral thermometer), chills, cough, or burning when you pass urine.
<p>Normal platelets help your blood to clot normally after an injury (e.g., cut). When the platelet count is low, you may be more likely to bruise or bleed.</p>	<p>To help prevent bleeding problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try not to bruise, cut, or burn yourself. • Clean your nose by blowing gently. Do not pick your nose. • Avoid constipation. • Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush as your gums may bleed more easily. <p>Some medications such as ASA (e.g., ASPIRIN®) or ibuprofen (e.g., ADVIL®) may increase your risk of bleeding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not stop taking any medication that has been prescribed by your doctor (e.g., ASA for your heart), but do discuss this with your doctor. • For minor pain, try acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) first, but occasional use of ibuprofen may be acceptable. Take your temperature prior to taking either of these medications.

Side effects are listed in the following table in the order in which they may occur. Tips to help manage the side effects are included.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Pain or tenderness may occur where the needle was placed.</p>	<p>Apply cool compresses or soak in cool water for 15-20 minutes several times a day.</p>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Nausea and vomiting may occur after your treatment and may last for 48 hours. If you are vomiting and it is not controlled, you can quickly become dehydrated. Most people have little or no nausea. Nausea and vomiting are more common with higher doses.</p>	<p>You may be given a prescription for antinausea drug(s) to take before your treatment and/or at home. It is easier to prevent nausea than treat it once it has occurred, so follow directions closely.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of fluids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. • Try the ideas in <i>Practical Tips to Manage Nausea</i>.* <p>Tell your healthcare team if nausea or vomiting continues or is not controlled with your antinausea drug(s).</p>
<p>Fever may commonly occur shortly after treatment with cytarabine. Fever should last no longer than 24 hours.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day. • Fever (over 38°C or 100°F by an oral thermometer) which occurs more than a few days after treatment may be a sign of an infection. Report this to your healthcare team immediately.
<p>Eye or vision problems (such as red or watery eyes, sensitivity to light, eye pain, or blurry vision) sometimes occur with cytarabine.</p>	<p>You may be given a prescription for eye drops to prevent eye problems before they occur. It is important to follow the directions closely.</p> <p>Tell your healthcare team if you have eye problems. If you have eye pain or changes in your vision, report this to your healthcare team immediately.</p>
<p>Sore mouth may sometimes occur a few days after treatment. Mouth sores can occur on the tongue, the sides of the mouth, or in the throat. Mouth sores or bleeding gums can lead to an infection. Sore mouth is more common with higher doses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brush your teeth gently after eating and at bedtime with a very soft toothbrush. If your gums bleed, use gauze instead of a brush. Use baking soda instead of toothpaste. • Make a mouthwash with ¼ teaspoon baking soda AND ¼ teaspoon salt in 1 cup warm water and rinse several times a day. • Try the ideas in <i>Food Ideas to Try with a Sore Mouth</i>.*

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
Confusion, memory loss, and/or abnormal speech or body movements may sometimes occur. These symptoms are more common with higher doses.	Call your healthcare team immediately if you have these symptoms.
Loss of appetite may sometimes occur and may persist after discontinuation of cytarabine.	Try the ideas in <i>Food Ideas to Help with Decreased Appetite</i> .*
Hair loss is rare with cytarabine. Hair loss is more common with higher doses. Your hair will grow back once you stop treatment with cytarabine. Colour and texture may change.	If hair loss is a problem, refer to <i>Resources for Hair Loss and Appearance Changes – Patient Handout</i> .* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a gentle shampoo and soft brush. • Care should be taken with use of hair spray, bleaches, dyes, and perms.

***Please ask your nurse or pharmacist for a copy.**

CHECK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM OR GET EMERGENCY HELP IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE:

- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (over 38°C or 100°F by an oral thermometer), shaking chills; cough, severe sore throat, productive cough (coughing up thick or green sputum); cloudy or foul smelling urine; painful, tender, or swollen red skin wounds or sores.
- Signs of **bleeding problems** such as black, tarry stools; blood in urine; pinpoint red spots on skin; extensive bruising.
- Signs of an **allergic reaction** (rare) soon after a treatment including dizziness, fast heart beat, face swelling, or breathing problems.
- **Seizures** or fainting.
- Signs of **heart or lung problems** such as fast or uneven heartbeat, chest pain, chest pressure, shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing, swelling of ankles, or fainting.
- **Memory loss, trouble thinking, or changes in mood; difficulty talking; trouble with balance, walking, clumsiness or weakness on one side of the body.**

CHECK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (DURING OFFICE HOURS) IF YOU HAVE:

- Signs of **anemia** such as unusual tiredness or weakness.
- Signs of **liver problems** such as yellow eyes or skin, white or clay-coloured stools.
- Signs of **gout** such as joint pain.
- **Numbness or tingling** in feet or hands.
- **Changes in eyesight or eye irritation.**
- Ringing in your ears or **hearing problems.**

